CHAPTER 1: ARRIVALS AT THE PORT

ALRIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH!

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IT SEEMS YOU'RE GETTING A LITTLE SELF AWARENESS...

FIGHTS ARE ALWAYS RELATIVE...

IF YOU OBSERVE YOUR OPPONENT, YOU CAN DISCOVER THEIR SPECIAL TRAITS AND WEAK POINTS, EVEN IF THEY WON'T WANT YOU TO.

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HOW WAS IT YOU TWO?

THOUGH HE RARELY FINDS HIMSELF UNDER ATTACK, HIS DISTANT BACKS MEANS HE STRUGGLES TO GO ON THE OFFENSIVE.

CONVERSLY, HERNANDO'S BLESSED WITH A TALL BODY, AND LONG ARMS. YET HE FINDS IT TOO MUCH TO MANAGE.

GETTY HAS A SMALL BUILD WITH SHORT ARMS AND LEGS. UNLESS HE STEPS RIGHT INTO HIS OPPONENT'S CHEST, HE'S UNABLE TO LAND ANY SIGNIFICANT BLOWS.

LEARN THIS WELL, ATTACK AND DEFENSE ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. FAIL TO, AND IT'LL BECOME A DIRE WEAK POINT.

WHAT'S MORE, YOU BOTH LACK IN COURAGE! YOU'RE FAR TOO COWARDLY TO EVEN ATTACK!

I'VE STRUCK THIS A GOOD HUNDRED TIMES!

DON'T SLACK OFF, I'M WATCHING YOU!

PED-RO!

YOU'RE 'ORRIBLE MASTER!

I'LL SET YOU EACH A NEW TASK ONCE YOU'VE RESTED.

GET YOUR BREATH BACK.

...

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I WANT TO SEE YOUR RESULTS.

ALRIGHT, TRY OUT A PUNCH.

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YOUR CENTRES OFF, YOUR WHOLE BODY'S MISMATCHED ISN'T IT?!

HOLD IT, HOLD IT! THIS IS ENTIRELY WRONG!

YOU'RE FAR TOO HAPHAZARD, HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT I TOLD YOU?!

BUT YOU WERE THE ONE WHO TOLD ME TO HIT IT 100 TIMES.

YOU'RE MISUNDERSTAND-ING ITERATIVE LEARNING!

IF YOU PUNCH POORLY, THE ONLY THING YOU'LL HURT IS YOUR OWN WRIST.

PULL YOUR ELBOW BACK, THE MOMENT YOU STRIKE YOU SHOULD FIRMLY TIGHTEN YOUR WRIST.

IT'S A WEAK WILL THAT SWAPS THEIR MEANS AND THEIR ENDS!

FOOLS ARE PRONE TO SUCH PITFALLS!

BE ON YOUR GUARD!

HOWEVER, YOU BECAME FOCUSED SIMPLY ON CHASING THAT 100 FIGURE. IN DOING SO YOUR METHOD BECAME YOUR END GOAL!

WHAT'S YOUR GOAL? IT'S TO LEARN HOW TO PUNCH PROPERLY, RIGHT?

IT'S QUITE NATURAL TO LOSE YOUR POSTURE WHILE TRYING SOMETHING HUNDREDS OF TIMES.

GIMME A MOMENT...

HM... GOT IT.

MASTER! I'M DONE WITH MY BASIC WORKOUT.

AND THIS TIME, DO IT WITH PROPER CARE.

DO IT ANOTHER 50 TIMES.

GEEEEH-

...

MOVE YOUR SHOULDER IN, PULL YOUR ELBOW BACK.

YOU WANT TO INSTANTLY BIND YOUR TOES, AND FIX YOUR CORE!

EH?

YOU GO CESTVS.

IT'S FINE.

YES SIR...

HURRY UP!

WHAT'S WRONG?

ANOTHER SHIP'S COME IN!

WE NEED SOMEONE TO HELP!

COME WITH US.

SO IT WAS OBVIOUS THEY'D UNDERTAKE DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAINING.

THEY WEREN'T EQUAL THOUGH...

THERE WERE FOUR STUDENTS TO THE ONE MASTER.

IT WAS ONLY TOO EVIDENT THAT THIS WOULD LEAD TO A DECREASE IN CESTVS' TRAINING TIME.

RATHER, CESTVS WAS ANGRY.

FEELINGS OF VEXATION AND ALIENATION FURTHER ADDED TO HIS IMPATIENCE.

IT WAS NOT A CASE OF INDULGING A SUPERIORITY COMPLEX...

YET ALL I DO EACH DAY IS CARRY BAGS, WHILE RECEIVING PRETTY MUCH NO TRAINING.

I THOUGHT WE CAME HERE TO FIGHT.

AREN'T I HIS BEST STUDENT?!

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HEY, WHAT'S WITH THE AWFUL FACE?

TIRED ALREADY?

!

I'M A BUSY GUY AFTER ALL...

IF YOU END UP DROWNING, I WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP.

DON'T GO WALKING CARELESSLY AND DROPPING INTO THE SEA NOW.

NAAH, JUST BEEN THINKING KALDAN.

KALDAN OF NUMIDIA.

HE SEEMED A DEGREE OLDER THAN ZAFAR...

HE WAS A MAGNANIMOUS CHARACTER, AT THE TOP OF THE PIER SLAVES.

IT SEEMED AS THOUGH HE HAD GROWN TO GREATLY SYMPATHIZE WITH HIS FELLOW MAN, OWING IN PART TO THE MONOTONOUS, HARD LABOUR HE FACED.

HE WAS ESPECIALLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE SMALL FRAMED CESTVS.

I SORTA GET THAT...

MM...

IF A SMALL MAN LIKE YOU SHOWS EXCELLENT RESULTS, THEN YOU'LL RECEIVE ALL THE MORE ATTENTION AND HONOUR FOR IT.

I ALWAYS FIGURED THAT, EVEN IF YOU WERE DISADVANTAGED, YOU COULD TURN IT INTO A MEANS OF ESCAPE...

THE WORLD'S LIKE THAT...

FROM ANCIENT TIMES IT'S BEEN A COUNTRY HOME TO EQUESRIAN NOMADS.

HASN'T YOUR MASTER TOLD YOU ANYTHING?

WHAT SORT OF COUNTRY IS NUMIDIA*?

* NUMIDIA WAS LOCATED IN NORTH AFRICA, CLOSE TO WHAT IS NOW MODERN DAY ALGERIA. IT NEIGHBOURED CARTHAGE, ITSELF CLOSE TO MODERN DAY TUNISIA.

IN THE CLOSING YEARS OF THE PUNIC WARS**, SCIPIO*** SOUGHT AN ALLIANCE WITH THE NUMIDIAN TRIBES. THIS ALLIANCE WOULD HELP RADICALLY CHANGE THE WAR IN HIS FAVOUR.

THE ROAR OF NUMIDIAN MERCENARIES ON THEIR HEROIC, SWIFT STEEDS LONG POSED A MENACE TO THE ARMIES OF ROME.

** A SERIES OF GREAT WARS FOUGHT BETWEEN ROME AND CARTHAGE OVER MEDITERRANEAN HEGEMONY. WITHIN THE NUMIDIAN TRIBES THEMSELVES COMPLICATED ANTAGONISMS EXISTED AND, FROM THE SECOND PUNIC WAR, FIGHTERS FROM NUMIDIAN TRIBES WOULD FIGHT ALONGSIDE BOTH ROMAN AND CARTHAGINIAN FORCES.

*** SCIPIO AFRICANUS WAS A ROMAN GENERAL. HE DEFEATED LEGENDARY GENERAL, AND LONGTIME FOE, HANNIBAL DURING THE SECOND PUNIC WAR. DURING THE THIRD PUNIC WAR HIS ADOPTED GRANDSON, WHOM HE SHARED HIS NAME WITH, SCIPIO AEMILIANUS WOULD DESTROY CARTHAGE.

RIGHT NOW IT'S NOTHING MORE THAN A ROMAN PROVINCE...

WELL, THAT'S JUST AN OLD TALE NOW.

AAH... NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I SEE IT, I CAN NEVER GET TIRED OF THIS SCENE.

IT'S AMAZING... IN THE EVENING LIGHT THE BLUE TURNS BRIGHT RED...

THIS'LL BE THE SIXTEENTH.

I GUESS IT'S JUST AN OLD MAN'S GRUMBLING NOW.

FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS, NOT A DAY HAS GONE BY THAT I'VE NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO RETURN HOME, KALDAN?

I WONDER IF MASTER FEELS THE SAME WAY?

SO HIS HOMETOWN IS THAT IMPORTANT TO HIM EH...

I'LL FINALLY BE ABLE TO MAKE IT BACK...

WELL, I'M SURE THAT, IF I'M JUST A LITTLE MORE PATIENT...

HOME SICK-NESS?

ELSE YOU FEEL YOUR HEART COULD SPLIT FROM HOMESICKNESS.

WHEN YOU END UP IN YOUR TWILIGHT YEARS LIKE ME, YOU CAN'T GO GETTING TOO EMOTIONAL...

THERE, IT WERE AS THOUGH THE GIGANTIC SUN WOULD MELT INTO THE HORIZON.

THE SUNSET HERE IN NAPOLIE IS NOTHING LIKE THAT OF MY HOMETOWN'S.

OH! GUESS HE CAUGHT YOU.

MAS-TER...

HELLOOO!

...!

IF YOU'RE DONE WITH WORK, GET BACK TO PRACTICE!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING JUST IDLING HERE?!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

CESTVS!

YOU DONT NEED TO SHOUT.

JUST RUN. NO NEED FOR POINTLESS CHATTER...!

NOW NOW...

I'M GOING!

BAH, WHAT WAS THAT?!

MY APOLOGIES. I GUESS YOU MUST'VE TALKED ABOUT A LOT.

MM...

YOU NEEDN'T SCOLD THE KID SO MUCH... OKAY?

I WAS THE ONE WHO STOPPED AND TALKED TO HIM FOR SO LONG.

...

THAT HONEST NATURE OF HIS WILL CAUSE HIM TROUBLE IN THE FUTURE...

HE WORKS REAL HARD...

THOUGH HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE'S EVEN 16 YET.

I'M WELL AWARE.

MM.

I COULD IMAGINE HIM BEING JUST LIKE THAT BOY...

16 THOUGH...

THINKING ABOUT IT MY SON SHOULD BE ABOUT THAT AGE.

TRUTH BE TOLD I WAS NEVER ABLE TO FIND OUT HIS REAL AGE.

I FIGURE MY REAL ATONMENT WILL ONLY BEGIN ONCE I MAKE IT BACK HOME.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER MY SON WAS BORN AN ILLNESS RAVAGED OUR LIVESTOCK...

I ENDED UP GETTING INVOLVED WITH SOME PETTY THIEVES, THOUGH EVENTUALLY FOUND MYSELF IN THIS SAD SPOT AS A SLAVE...

HAVE FAMILY WAITING FOR YOU BACK HOME...?

YOU...

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I...

AND WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE YOU WERE BORN A SLAVE...

NO...

...

SORRY

I DIDN'T MEAN TO PRY...

YOU NEEDN'T ANSWER IF IT'S UNREASONABLE...

I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT... IT'S WHAT YOU'D EXPECT FROM SOMEONE IN HIS UNSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES...

THERE'S NOT A LOT YOU CAN DO IF SOMEONE WANTS TO HIDE THEIR WELL OFF, REFINED AND CULTURED UPBRINGING...

SHIIIT!

SHIT.

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SHIT.

...

WHERE'S IT FROM?!

THEY'RE ENTERING THE PORT THIS LATE?!

OI, OI. IT'S NIGHT AIN'T IT?!

A SHIPS COMING IN!

GET SOME TORCHES TOGETHER!

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?

THE MAIN GUESTS HAVE ARRIVED.

SEND THEM A FITTING WELCOME.

JUST WHO'S SHIP IS IT?!

MASTER JIMENEZ!

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THIS LATE TOO...

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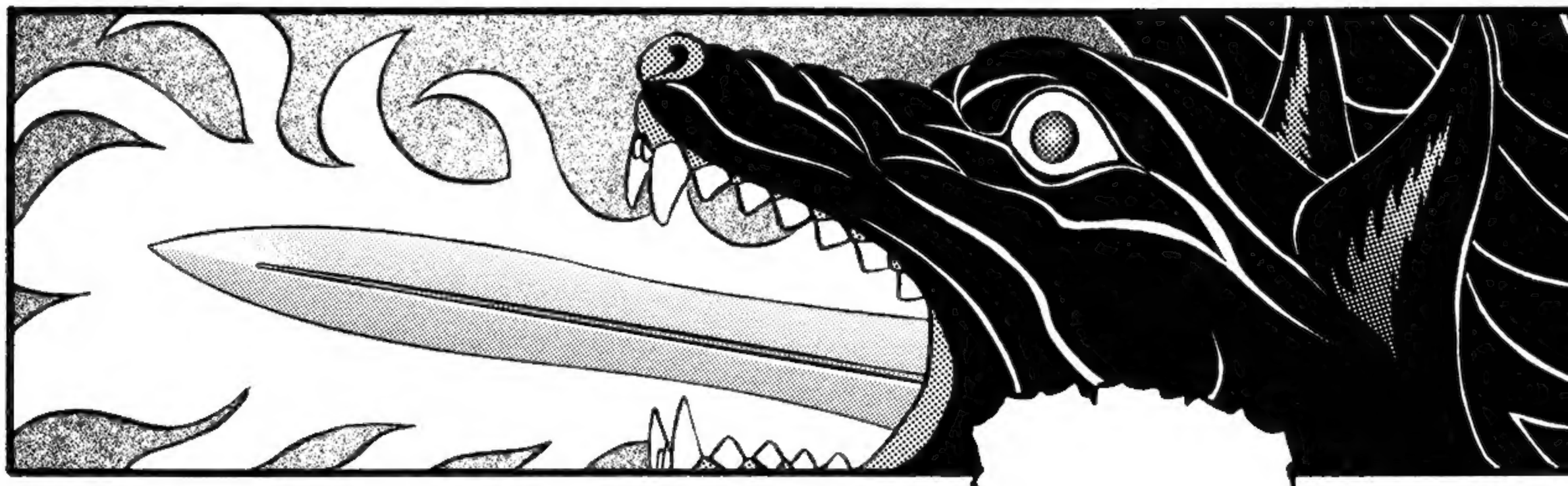

IT... IT...
IT'S THE ARMED FIGHTER GROUP "CERBERUS"!